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Minority
Focus
Story
Machine

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College Educators Are Concerned Over a Stagnation in Minority Enrollment

'Nobody's Ever Helped Us'

In contrast to the past, a majority of aid now comes in the form of repayable loans rather than outright grants. "Minority kids are much more reluctant to burden themselves with heavy loan indebtedness," Professor Blackwell said. College officials frequently emphasize their eagerness to arrange financial aid packages for talented poor students, but to some students the offers ring hollow.

"The guidance counselors tell us there's financial aid and other help, but we know nobody's ever helped us before," said Stacey Willis, an 18-year-old senior at Lafayette High School in Buffalo who is planning to enter the Army after graduation. "Once you start hearing those numbers, like thousands of dollars, most of us just say forget it."

Educators and others also cite a considerable shift in the political and social climate. Clifford R. Wharton, Jr., who recently resigned as Chancellor of the State University of New York, said, "Many of our fellow citizens seem to believe that the need for affirmative action is past."

Raised 'Expectation Levels'

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, a contender for the Democratic nomination for president in 1988, attributed the declining minority presence in part to "the lack of pressure from the Reagan White House for goals and timetables."

But he predicted that recent Supreme Court decisions upholding affirmative action programs, combined with reactions to the recent racial disturbances, would encourage a different climate.

"The effect has been that expectation levels have been raised," he said. "People are again talking about the goal of minority enrollment being proportional to their total population."

Affirmative action programs in employment also may be having a reverse impact on affirmative action in education, said Jerry H. Robbins, dean of the College of Education at Georgia State University in Atlanta.

Such programs "have opened up jobs which might not previously have been available" to graduating minority students, he said, adding, "They see their friends getting jobs and making at least minimum wage and they want to get out and get themselves a job rather than continuing their education."

Another contributing factor, suggested Mr. Wilson, was the emergence of "the first post-civil rights generation on campus."

"For the average sophomore, born the year Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated," he said, "everything that happened prior to the civil rights movement is ancient history."

Peer pressure among minority youths does not help the situation. Tamara McMillan, a black senior at Lafayette High School in Buffalo, said that when she tells friends she plans to go to college: "They tell me it's going to take too long and that I won't make it. But my mother told me, 'Don't let anyone tell you what you can't do. Just do it.'"

Where Recruiting Pays Off

Although many colleges and universities, including many of the most selective ones, have increased efforts to recruit minority students, they have been criticized as not doing enough.

"Blacks were admitted here because the laws have changed," said Haydn B. Renwick, associate dean of arts and sciences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "The laws have changed, but the minds haven't. The university is not committed to increasing black enrollment."

Some colleges, however, have found that sustained recruiting pays off. At Wesleyan University in Connecticut, which has held telethons and special events for minority students, the percentage of blacks has risen from 6 percent for the class that entered in 1976 to more than 10 percent for this year's freshman class. Hispanic students have increased from 1.6 percent to 4.5 percent over the same period. The percentage of blacks on the faculty has also increased, from 3.3 percent to 5.3 percent, over the last decade.

"Wesleyan is at a point where it could enroll a significant number of minority students without making much of an effort," said Clifford Thornton, dean of minority admissions. "When minority students visit Wesleyan, they see other minority students, and they realize that if they attended the school, they wouldn't have to be trailblazers."

But another effective recruiter is the military, which not only advertises widely but sends representatives to the homes of potential enlistees. "The military used to be a dirty word," said Philip Carlivati, a guidance counselor at Franklin High School in Rochester. "Now it has lost that stigma."

Leslie Smith, 17, a senior at McDonough High School in New Orleans, has enlisted in the Navy because he did not want the "heavy burden" of college on his family. "I feel like the military will lead me to get a lot of experience, traveling, a lot of benefits," he said.

He also has doubts about whether a college degree will pay off. He said he used to work at a fast-food restaurant where two assistant managers had degrees in business administration. "Things should be a little better," he said, "considering the years you have to go to get the degree."

Dropping Out of College

College officials say that one frequently overlooked aspect of the problem is the high rate of minority students who reach college but drop out before they graduate. At the University of North Carolina, for example, the dropout rate among black freshmen over four years rose from 40 percent for those who entered in the fall of 1978 to 49 percent for those arriving in 1982. "We're getting the reputation that we're just admitting minority students and kicking them out the back door as soon as possible," said Dean Renwick.

Minority college students in predominantly white colleges also say they face formidable social pressures.

"If you hang around black students, people see you as militant," said Richard Gamble, a junior economics major at the University of Chicago. "But if you hang around white students, then your black friends say, 'You forgot where you came from' or 'You think you're white now.'"

Martha Laura Melendez, a junior psychology major at the University of Michigan who graduated from a predominantly Mexican-American high school in El Paso, found the adjustment difficult. "I've had to leave behind a part of my culture to succeed here," she said.



The New York Times/Joe Traver

Stacey Willis and Tamara McMillan, seniors at Lafayette High School in Buffalo. He plans to join the Army, and she plans to go to college.

Enrollment of Minorities In Colleges Stagnating

NYT
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By EDWARD B. FISKE

Two decades after colleges and universities began opening their doors to substantial numbers of minority students, the effort to diversify American higher education appears to have stagnated.

The latest Federal figures show that blacks have a smaller presence on American campuses than they did six years ago, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of all undergraduates.

The enrollment of Hispanic students, although rising slightly, lags far behind their overall representation in the population.

"After a period in which minorities were courted and welcomed, disillusionment has now set in on both sides," said Donald Stewart, former president of Spelman College in Atlanta, a black college for women.

Series of Racial Incidents

"Many universities, particularly the more selective ones, found that blacks and Hispanics were less well prepared than they wanted and that absorbing significant numbers of minorities into campus life could be somewhat disruptive," said Mr. Stewart, the new president of the College Board, which administers the Scholastic Aptitude Test, used by many colleges in determining admissions.

"On the other side, many blacks found the academic environment rather inhospitable," he said.

The absence of continued growth of minority enrollment comes amid a series of racial incidents in recent months at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of Michigan, Columbia University and elsewhere. In the Amherst incident last October, up to 3,000 students were involved in a brawl that left 10 people injured, including a black student who was beaten unconscious.

"There is a perception that blacks and other minorities are no longer welcome on college campuses," said Joseph D. Duffey, chancellor at the Amherst campus, "and I'm troubled by that."

Twenty-eight small liberal arts colleges, from Swarthmore in Pennsylvania to Pomona in California, recently formed a consortium to develop ways of attracting more minority students. The board of directors of the American

Council on Education, the principal higher education umbrella group, with headquarters in Washington, will hold a two-day meeting on the subject next month.

More Attractive Options

Educators cite various reasons for the leveling off of the minority presence, including rising tuition, declining Federal student assistance, reduced social and political pressure for affirmative action and a lack of aggressive recruiting by college admissions staffs.

These and other factors have combined, some say, to deflate the aspirations of minority high school students and to make military service or a job, however low in pay, a more attractive option.

Angie Tillman, an 18-year old senior at McDonogh High School in New Orleans, for example, considered applying for college but decided instead to apply to a beauty school.

"There are people going to four-year college, and then they can't get a job," she said. "I finally made up my mind, knowing you can't count on tomorrow. When you walk out your door, it's very easy to get shot. A shorter goal, to me, is more logical to have. Tomorrow is not one of those things you can count on."

According to the American Council on Education, which compiles statistics from various branches of the Department of Education, members of minority groups now make up 21 percent of the American population but only 17 percent of college enrollment.

Patterns Vary By Race

Data show that overall minority enrollment has continued to grow. In 1976 there were 1,691,000 minority students in two- and four-year colleges, representing 15.4 percent of all students. By 1984 the figure had risen to 2,063,000, or 17 percent of the total. The patterns, however, vary widely by race.

According to the council, black enrollment reached a peak in 1976, when 1,032,000 blacks made up 9.4 percent of the college population. By 1984 there were 1,070,000 black students, 8.8 percent of the total.

Over the same time, Hispanic students gradually increased to 529,000 in 1984, or 4.3 percent of the college population, from 383,000, or 3.5 percent, in 1976. Enrollment of American Indian students decreased slightly, from 84,000 to 83,000, or seven-tenths of 1 percent of the total, in that period.

The one ethnic minority to show substantial gains was Asian-Americans. Their representation increased to 382,000, or 3.1 percent of all students in 1984, from 197,000, or 1.8 percent, in 1976.

Trend of the 1970's Reversed

Statistics from the Census Bureau show a similar pattern. Last fall the bureau reported that black enrollment peaked in 1981 at 1,133,000 million students and by 1985 was down to 1,049,000 students.

Reports from specific institutions suggest that the trends are continuing. At Cornell University, for example, black undergraduate enrollment has declined from 5.5 percent to 4.6 percent of all students since 1982. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill the percentage of black undergraduates dropped from 10 percent in 1983 to 8.9 percent this year.

Rising Cost of Education

Reginald Wilson, director of the American Council on Education's Office of Minority Concerns, said the figures understated racial discrepancies because "blacks and Hispanics tend to be disproportionately concentrated in two-year institutions."

Mr. Wilson added that one encouraging trend of the 1970's, an increase in the percentage of black high school graduates going on to college, had now reversed itself. "The minority high school dropout rate is a major problem," he said. "But even if you look only at those who graduate from high school the gap between the college-going rate of blacks and whites is widening."

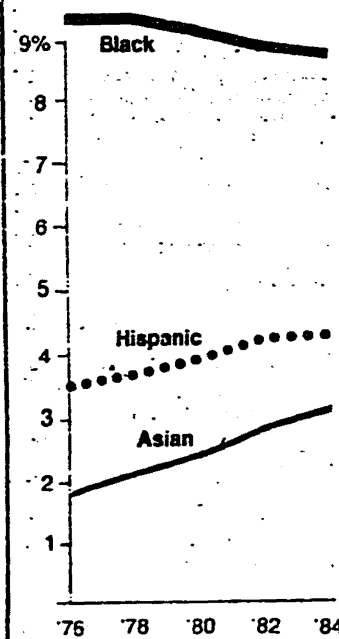
One factor in the declining number of black and Hispanic students is the cost of college, which for the last few years has been increasing at more than double the rate of inflation. The College Board estimates that it now costs \$5,604 a year to attend the average public institution and \$10,199 at a typical private one.

"You think about the poverty line now being around \$11,000, which means that one-third of all black families are in poverty," said James E. Blackwell, a professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. "This means that there is a huge number of people who don't have the money to send their kids to school."

For many minority students, the problem has been compounded by a substantial decline in Federal student assistance. A Congressional study last year concluded that in terms of 1986 buying power, Federal grants and scholarships fell from \$13 billion in the 1975 academic year to \$5 billion in 1985, a drop of 62 percent.

College and Race

Percent of students at all institutions of higher education from each minority group.



Source: American Council on Education from Federal Education Department

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